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SUBJECT: FORMER POLISH PM KACZYNSKI MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Ashe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a January 9 meeting with the Ambassador, a subdued and reflective Jaroslaw Kaczynski -- former Prime Minister and current chair of the opposition Law and Justice (PiS) party -- characterized the U.S.-Georgia charter as an important development given Georgia's precarious political situation. Kaczynski expressed concern about the EU's weak response to a resurgent Russia, noting that PM Tusk's efforts to engage Russia -- and Germany -- had not yielded any results. On the Ukraine-Russia gas dispute, he argued that "Poland would not have any gas" if the Nordstream pipeline were in operation today. Kaczynski seemed confident about his party's prospects for returning to power, stating that his party had learned valuable lessons. Kaczynski said he was "certain" that the Sejm would pass legislation on compensation for WWII and Communist-era confiscations within the next two or three years. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador noted that 2009 is a year of important anniversaries, including the 90th anniversary of Polish-U.S. diplomatic relations, the 70th anniversary of the beginning of WWII, the 50th anniversary of the Fulbright Educational Exchange Program, and the 20th anniversary of the fall of communism. Kaczynski said the Fulbright Program had been important because it offered Polish academics and intellectuals access to Western thought. He noted that his dissertation director had been a Fulbrighter. He expressed gratitude for constant U.S. support during the difficult years of communist rule. Kaczynski expressed hope that President-elect Obama would visit Poland in 2009.

CONCERNS ABOUT RUSSIA

¶3. (C) Kaczynski asked about the status of U.S. plans to sign a bilateral charter with Georgia. Even if only a temporary solution, he said, the charter is an important development given Georgia's precarious political situation. He stressed the need to show bilateral support, particularly given the lack of support within NATO for Georgian membership and the EU's suspension of some of activities in Georgia. Russia's policy on Georgia and Ukraine is clear for all to see, Kaczynski said. He stressed the importance of maintaining a strong NATO and expressed concern that the EU's "weakening position" vis-a-vis Russia would soon put Poland in a difficult position. We want the EU to be strong, he said, but would prefer if the EU had a "slightly different structure."

¶4. (C) Kaczynski said he had been reassured by President-elect Obama's picks for top national security positions, noting that statements made during the campaign had "raised some doubts." It is now clear, Kaczynski said, that the new administration's policy will be within the "normal swing of the pendulum." Kaczynski said recent developments in Russia's foreign policy had proven the merits of his government's efforts to strengthen U.S.-Polish relations. We were clear on our policy toward Russia and

Germany, Kaczynski said, "and we were right." In contrast, PM Tusk's efforts to engage Russia and Germany had yielded "no positive results." He criticized Tusk's "historical policy" with respect to Germany. He quietly argued that, were the Nordstream pipeline in operation today, "Poland would not have any gas."

MISSILE DEFENSE

15. (C) The global economic crisis had made the Missile Defense situation "more complicated," Kaczynski said, noting that his twin brother, President Lech Kaczynski, had been "worried about the lack of certainty" in talks with President-elect Obama. Kaczynski told the Ambassador that his government had had ambitious plans to purchase anti-aircraft and anti-missile technology from the United States. Because of the strong zloty, Kaczynski said, what we intended to purchase went far beyond what was in the agreement. "It was expensive, but our predictions indicated we could afford it." Pointing out that "anything is possible in politics," Kaczynski hinted that a future PiS government would pursue an expensive procurement agenda.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

16. (C) Kaczynski noted that the Tusk government's policies were "essentially identical" to the policies of his government, but are portrayed differently by the media. "The attacks on us (PiS), were absolutely groundless. Still, we have learned valuable lessons that will take us somewhere." He reported PiS was close to completing work on a new party platform, to be unveiled later this month at the PiS party

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congress in Nowa Huta. He confirmed the program would focus to a large extent on the global economic crisis. (NB: PiS presented a preview of its economic crisis in the Sejm January 9; its main points include increased spending for the poor, lower VAT on food, better absorption of EU funds, and government support for the residential mortgage market.) He noted that President Kaczynski had heard pessimistic reports in his December visits to South Korea, Mongolia, Japan, and Kazakhstan. Kaczynski expressed relief that Poland had not been strongly hit by the economic crisis.

PRIVATE PROPERTY RESTITUTION

17. (C) In response to a question, Kaczynski said he was "certain" that the Sejm would pass legislation on compensation for WWII and Communist-era confiscations. "The law will be adopted. The decision has already been made. It will not be questioned by anyone who has influence in Polish politics. It's only a matter of timing," Kaczynski said. If stock prices drop, the GoP would not be able to generate the necessary funds from privatization of large-scale state-owned enterprises, he explained. Kaczynski wondered aloud whether the 20% compensation envisioned in the current legislation would be considered "a satisfactory response." He noted that as PM he had heard a wide range of positions from concerned Jewish groups. Kaczynski said it would be better to reach agreement with Jewish organizations before passing legislation, but conceded such an approach might take two-to-three years.

GAZA CRISIS

18. (C) As the meeting concluded, Kaczynski expressed concern about the situation in Gaza, asking rhetorically about Israel's ultimate goal. He described the Israeli response as "quite drastic," noting that it had stirred emotions throughout the Arabic world. He pointed out that there had been a vast network of tunnels under Warsaw during the Nazi occupation. Even with 50,000 military and police (and no restrictions on repression and mass killings), the Nazis had not been able to prevent the construction of tunnels. Any Israeli attempt to keep Hamas from building tunnels will "be

a failure," Kaczynski said. "We are watching this conflict with very grave concern."

COMMENT

19. (C) More than a year after PiS's defeat in November 2007 early elections, Kaczynski continually polls as one of Poland's least popular and least trusted politicians. Right-wing commentators have called on Kaczynski to step down as party chair, arguing that he has kept PiS from reinventing itself. Late last year, Kaczynski reportedly went into seclusion to draft a new party platform. In his meeting with the Ambassador, Kaczynski conveyed a sense of quiet confidence, particularly on his party's prospects for returning to power. In contrast to his televised fiery condemnation of PM Tusk's economic policy on the floor of the Sejm only hours before, Kaczynski was soft-spoken (so much so that even his interpreter had difficulty hearing him) and reflective. While he was clearly listening, Kaczynski frequently gazed contemplatively into the distance, avoiding direct eye contact.

ASHE